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Ministry of Attorney General
and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism

B.C. STRENGTHENS CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

VICTORIA – Stronger measures to enforce family maintenance payments were introduced in the legislature today by Attorney General Wally Oppal.

"B.C. is committed to ensuring children receive the financial support they are entitled to from both parents," said Oppal. "Whether parents remain together or separate, the obligation to provide support remains. These changes will help ensure parents honour their financial duty to their children."

Bill 33, the Attorney General Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, introduces steps to ensure maintenance compliance. They include allowing the court to order a payer to provide future security for support payments in the event of a windfall, such as an inheritance; recovering arrears from lottery winnings over $10,000; and allowing money to be recouped from joint bank accounts.

The new measures also include denial of annual vehicle licences.

"Instead of waiting for five years to deny a driver's licence, as B.C currently does, we will be able to address non-payment annually, before the debt becomes overwhelming," Oppal said.

The Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) will contact parents twice if they are over $3,000 in arrears to advise their vehicle licence may be denied if they do not pay, or make arrangements to pay, their maintenance. People denied a licence will still be able to purchase a temporary licence for up to 15 days, but it's a costly option compared to annual renewal.

"These new measures bring B.C. in line with enforcement in other provinces, such as Alberta and Ontario," said Oppal.

To streamline the efficiency of FMEP, the legislation also:

- changes the rule that requires liens against property to be re-filed by the land titles office every time a court order is varied;
- allows FMEP to inform credit bureaus of the amount a payer is in arrears, which helps debtors by removing uncertainty and lenders by giving them accurate information;
- gives FMEP access to the protection order registry to enhance client safety; and
- permits FMEP to search for recipients, so if funds are received after a recipient has moved, they may be located for payment purposes.

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FMEP collects over $160 million each year, benefiting 75,000 children, most of them from families of modest means.

For more information about family justice programs, please visit: www.gov.bc.ca/ag

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Media contact: Shawn Robins
Communications Director
Ministry of Attorney General
250 387-4965

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